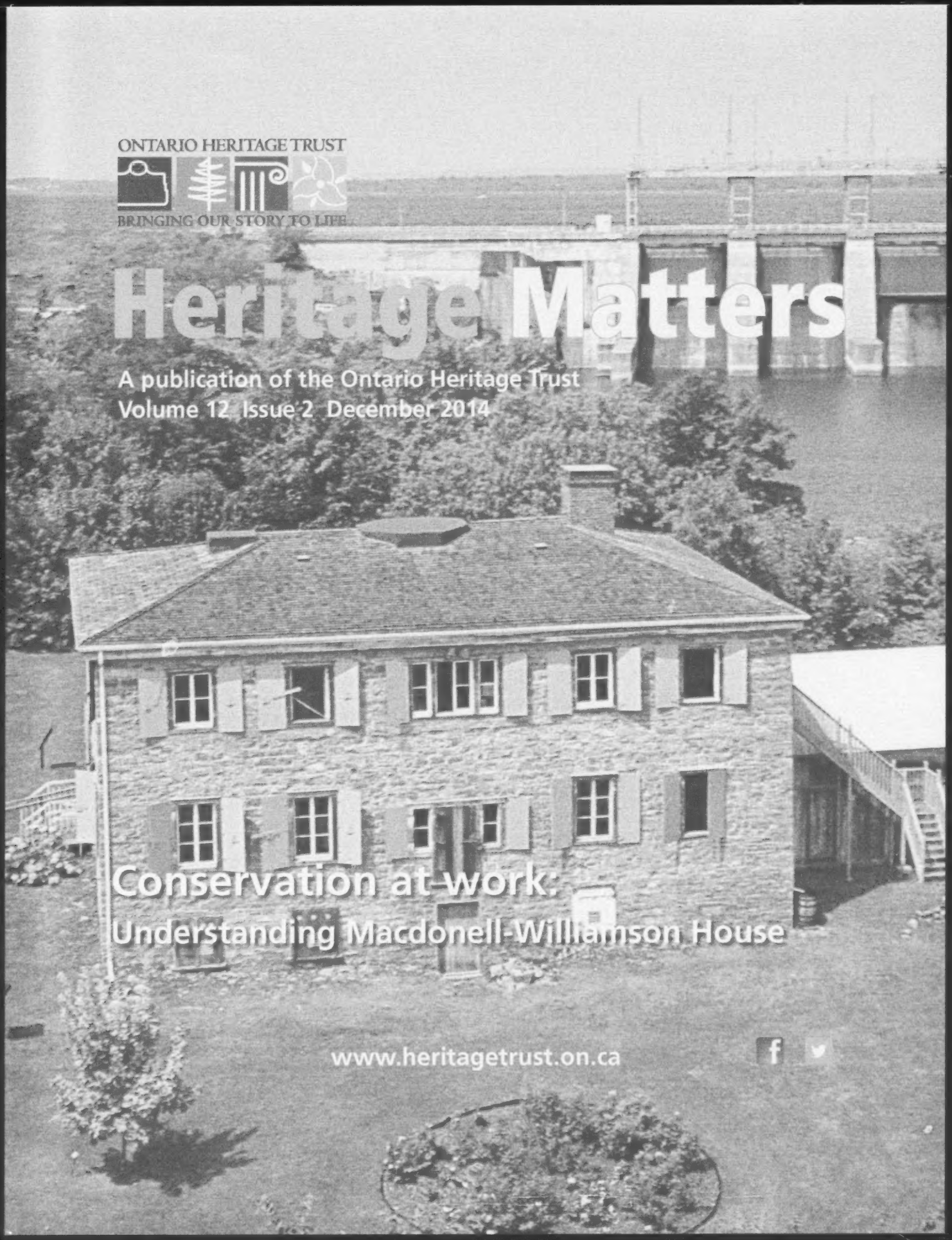

ONTARIO HERITAGE TRUST

BRINGING OUR STORY TO LIFE

Heritage Matters!

A publication of the Ontario Heritage Trust
Volume 12 Issue 2 December 2014

Conservation at work:
Understanding Macdonell-Williamson House

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Message from the CEO

Cultural heritage can be seen as the valued and special connection between place and people over time. Linked to specific communities, heritage values – both tangible and intangible – are most strongly expressed, understood and experienced in person and in detail. In order to conserve our heritage sites, we need to understand their meaning and relevance while connecting to, and considering them from, a diverse range of perspectives. Under the Ontario Heritage Act, the Trust preserves places that possess a broad range of heritage interests – historical, architectural, archaeological, recreational, esthetic, natural and scenic. The integration and balancing of these interests provide the means and motivation for us to understand and conserve our shared heritage.

In this issue of Heritage Matters, we take a closer look at one of the Trust's little-known treasures. Macdonell-Williamson House is a stabilized artifact – a ruin with an authentic Georgian patina. Located on a scenic riverside road in the hamlet of Pointe Fortune, this National Historic Site may at first appear as nothing more than an old stone house. Look more closely and the layers and complexities are revealed, and you find a cultural landscape that brings together the tangible heritage of place and artifact with the intangible of story and tradition. You'll also see the importance of the community's involvement and the significant contributions made by dedicated volunteers.

Sites like this are significant repositories for community memory. They hold tremendous potential for research, exploration and discourse.

Over the last 20 years, Macdonell-Williamson House has been incrementally conserved and the work continues today. This approach is necessitated by the need to raise significant funds and support for the site. While often frustrating, it has had the unforeseen benefit of realizing preservation and interpretive opportunities within the building fabric itself that might have been lost or overlooked if the property had been "restored" to a particular period in a single campaign, or renovated outright. Instead, the work is the result of ongoing circumspection and dialogue, humility and consensus building, which, in the long run, is the best kind of conservation.

Beth Hanna
CEO, Ontario Heritage Trust

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Cover: Aerial photograph of Macdonell-Williamson House with the Carillon Dam in the background. Photo: Carl Bigras

Message from the Chairman: Exploring Macdonell-Williamson House

The Ontario Heritage Trust conserves and directly operates numerous historical sites throughout Ontario, such as Uncle Tom's Cabin in Dresden, Fulford Place in Brockville, Homewood in Maitland, the Hudson Bay Company Staff House in Moose Factory, and Enoch Turner Schoolhouse in Toronto. It manages and interprets almost 90 per cent of its properties in partnership with local operators. Although arrangements vary with each property, they generally have the shared objectives of connecting to the community, sharing the stories embodied in the place, ensuring public access and day-to-day management, as well as maintaining viable and sustainable uses.

In this issue, we focus on a single site – Macdonell-Williamson House – where the Trust's expertise and experience in archaeology, architectural conservation, fundraising, research and history have combined with the community support and interest of a local partner – the Friends of the Macdonell-Williamson House – to ensure that this complex site is managed in a balanced and prudent manner.

Only a few steps from the Quebec border, Macdonell-Williamson House has a rich and diverse history linked to exploration, the fur trade, the lumber industry and the story of the Ottawa River. This history is reflected in the building itself, in the rich archaeological landscape of the site, and in the extended community of descendants of John Macdonell and William Williamson, many of whom are now located across North America. The building itself possesses a detailed archaeological record of its previous occupants that, on close inspection, can be read like an archive. The house is also an imposing architectural landmark in an ancient watershed, and the sole remainder of a lost and forgotten 19th-century village. The surrounding land comprises an archaeological landscape from which meaningful artifacts and structures have been unearthed that have changed our understanding of the site, its people and our shared history.

Though certainly not exhaustive, the approach and the combination of perspectives in this issue broaden and enrich our understanding of Macdonell-Williamson House. I hope that our description of this special place encourages you to visit the site and to experience firsthand its quiet grandeur.

Tom Symons

Thomas H.B. Symons
C.C., O.Ont, FRSC, LLD, D.Litt., D.U., D.Cn.L., FRGS, KSS

Perspectives on a site: Artifacts, fragments and layers

When the Trust conserves a property as complex as Macdonell-Williamson House, we consider a variety of perspectives related to the site as an artifact – both below and above ground. Exploring the underground landscape can help explain the greater context of the site, revealing its historical climate, economy, politics and culture. Unique archival evidence is also embodied in the architecture itself, which allows us to understand the evolution and use of the building's fabric over time. Exploring each nook and cranny shows a layered past that helps to illustrate an important era in Canada's development.

The following perspectives converge to create a unique lens through which we can come to a better understanding of the site and its place in our history.

Archaeology by Dena Doroszenko

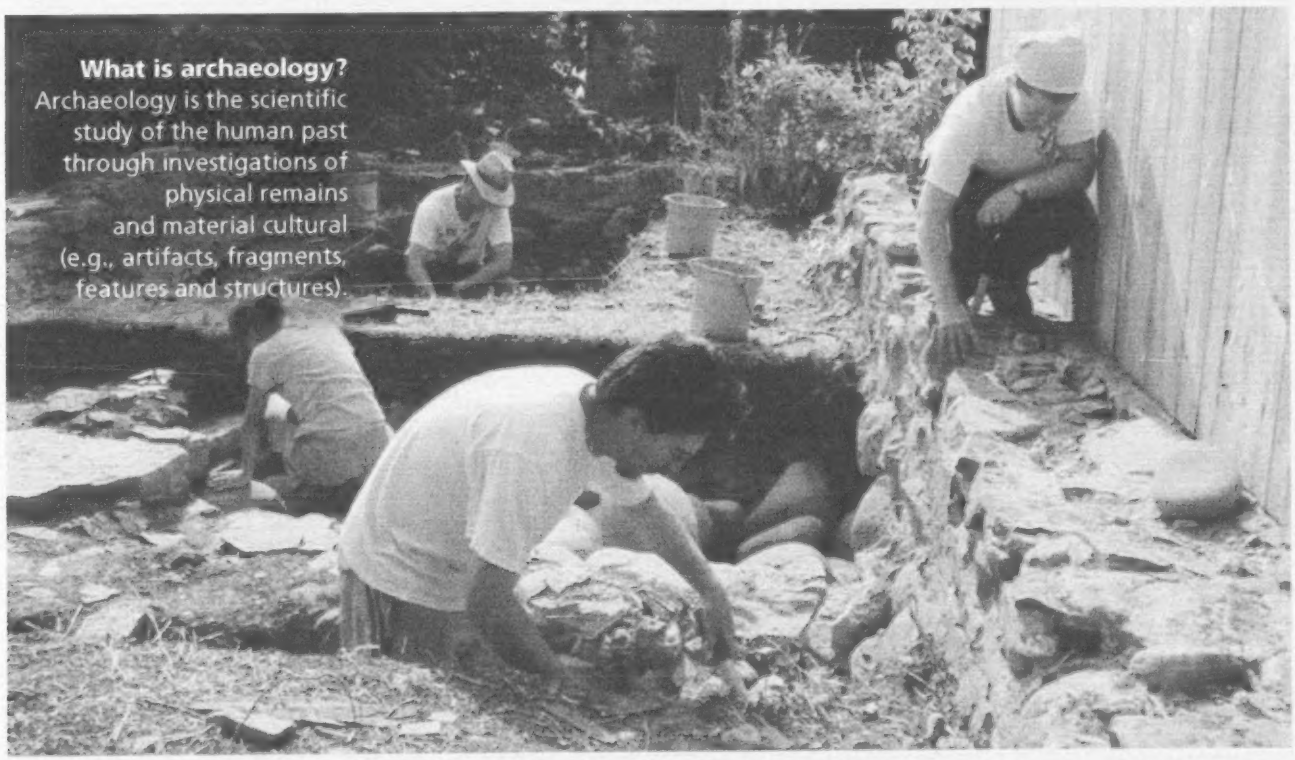
Archaeology reveals the story of the distant and recent past through the discovery, examination and interpretation of fragments. By their very nature, artifacts are evocative objects from the past, and they can also be studied and made legible.

The Trust-owned Macdonell-Williamson site – on a bluff above the Ottawa River in eastern Ontario – is a landscape of artifacts: the landmark 18th-century stone house being perhaps the most complex artifact of all. At this site, archaeology of the below-ground and above-ground variety is being used to enhance the historical narrative, and to develop an interpretive experience that embraces the concepts and values of patina, artifact and ruin.

The distant past

"Spanish John" Macdonell settled in New York state and then in St. Andrews West in the early 1790s. In 1793, his 25-year-old son John signed on as a clerk for the North West Company and soon became a partner. John Macdonell established a large family with his wife, Magdeleine Poitras. On his retirement, he moved the family to Montreal and, by 1813, bought a large property on the Ottawa River adjacent to the village of Pointe Fortune and the Carillon rapids.

What is archaeology?
Archaeology is the scientific study of the human past through investigations of physical remains and material cultural (e.g., artifacts, fragments, features and structures).



2007 excavations uncovered Macdonell's icehouse and smokehouse.

The land that Macdonell purchased was first patented in 1788 by William Fortune and contained numerous buildings. The large house that Macdonell built in 1817 implies that the family lived in relative affluence. Historical documentation and the archaeological record, however, suggest that Macdonell never attained this level of prosperity.

As early as 1820, just three years after building his house, he was in financial difficulty. The years that followed were less than kind to him for he was plagued by constant financial problems and personal tragedies. Nevertheless, the freight forwarding business he had established at first appeared successful. In 1821, the fur trade company for which Macdonell had once worked ceased to exist after amalgamation with its rival, the Hudson's Bay Company. This development had a significant impact on his life. It meant that he earned less from his fur trade interest than he had expected. This reversal of fortune at the time he was building his spacious home was probably quickly felt. Even worse, Macdonell's chosen location for his home was suddenly rendered irrelevant when the Hudson's Bay Company opted not to use the Ottawa waterway to bring goods to the interior.

On April 17, 1850, John Macdonell died at his home. He was 81. He left the house to his son, John Beverly Palafox Macdonell. By 1882, when the property was sold to the Williamson family, only three acres (1 hectare) remained of the original 1,400 acres (566 hectares). The Williamson family and their descendants occupied the house for the next 79 years and made significant changes to the house and outbuildings, but preserved the three acres that the Ontario Heritage Trust holds in trust today.

The recent past

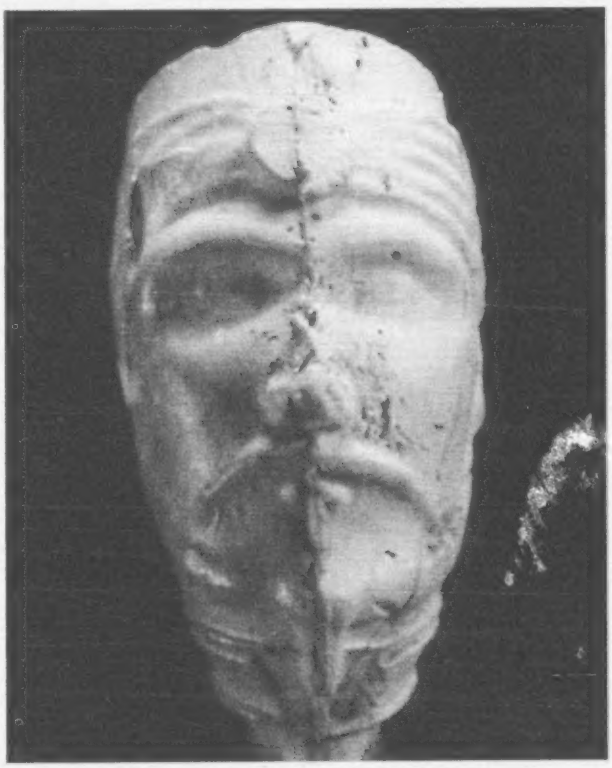
It seemed that the fate of the house was sealed when it was expropriated by Quebec Hydro in 1961 for the Carillon hydroelectric development. The dam was eventually constructed farther upstream and the house was spared, but left abandoned. It was designated a National Historic Site by the Government of Canada in 1969 and was acquired by the Ontario Heritage Trust in 1978. In 1995, the Friends of the Macdonell-Williamson House formed to become the Trust's operating partner and to run the property as a seasonal heritage attraction. This partnership initiated a period of investment in the study, archaeology and architectural preservation of the site that continues today.

The archaeological landscape

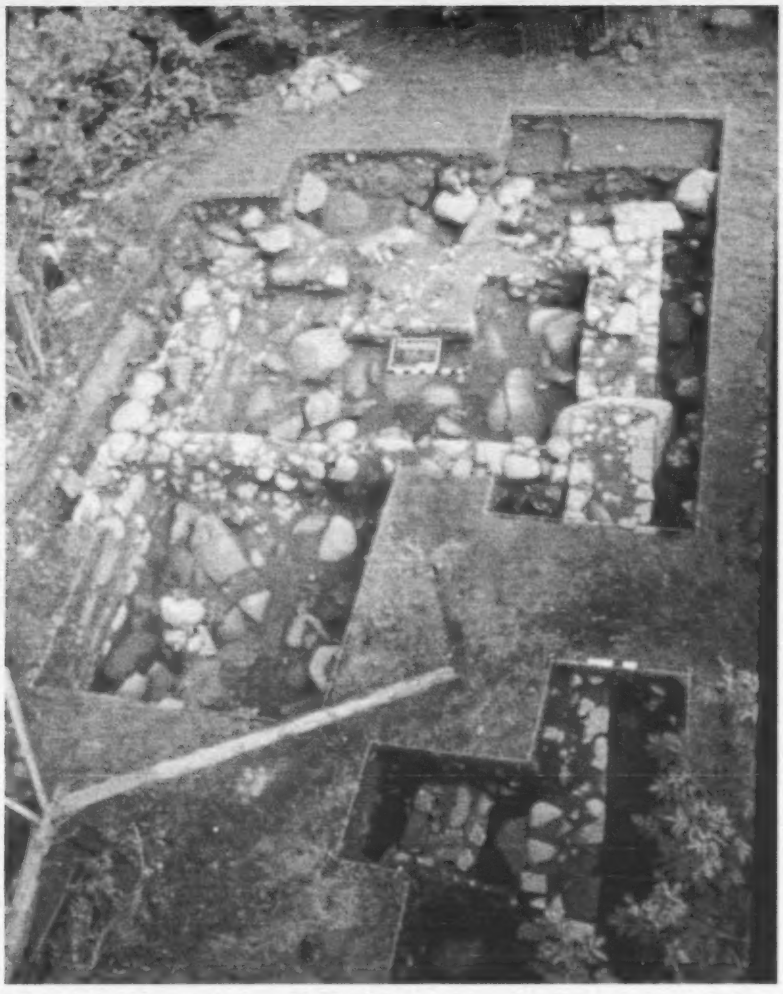
The Macdonell-Williamson property has evolved tremendously over more than 220 years. The archaeological landscape is a cultural construct in which our sense of place is transformed and changed by an understanding of history partly revealed through archaeology. What we see today, however, is not the site as it once was – a village-based culture with a thriving farm and business complex. A desire to read this landscape of ruins suggested by the historical record led to a series of archaeological investigations, beginning in 1978.

We know that John Macdonell was prolific in constructing outbuildings during his occupation of the property. Between 1817 and 1842, he built over 20 outbuildings; in the space of just one acre, six have been discovered archaeologically since 1981.

The work of several excavations has uncovered a wealth of physical records and new information, including structural evidence of earlier buildings. The foundations of the retail store built by Macdonell in 1822 were excavated to the north of the house. Excavation east of the basement entrance uncovered a massive stone foundation that runs diagonally to the main house wall. Based on the recovery of 18th-century coins associated with this feature, this structure may be one of



A Turk's head clay tobacco smoking pipe.



The stone foundations of Macdonell's 1822 store.

the buildings that William Fortune constructed (and that appears on a 1797 map). Excavations of the southeast lawn area uncovered a late-19th-century driveway bedding surface and a dry-laid wall. This wall may be related to one of the Macdonell buildings appearing on the 1829 historical map of the property.

The 2003 field season uncovered the stone foundations of an earlier building pre-dating the foundations at the north end of the shed on the north side of the house. These stone foundations likely represent the 1820s icehouse and smokehouse that are also shown on the 1829 map. Close to the house, five intact stone window wells and one dismantled window well along the west and south façades of the house were discovered; the blocked-up windows remain visible in the basement walls of the house.

All of these building foundations, so meticulously excavated, were documented and then carefully backfilled to ensure their preservation. They are again hidden from visitors. Yet, for interpretive purposes, they are part of the archaeological landscape.

Archaeology has recovered over 135,000 artifacts at the Macdonell-Williamson property and has contributed to an understanding of the farmstead landscape as it developed over time. The placement of foundations on the site seems to indicate a clustering around the house. On the east lawn, a collection of outbuildings are placed around the house, perhaps forming an entrance to the house through a courtyard.

These outbuildings include the 1822 retail shop, the icehouse and smokehouse as well as possibly a drive shed or stable. These are all functions related to the house, as well as the personal and business needs of its occupants, not necessarily the concerns of the farm and estate as a whole. The current road running to the immediate south of the house may originally have been a laneway and the outbuildings associated with agriculture and livestock placed on the other side, away from the house. As farms and farmers grew in personal wealth, the layout tended to change toward the courtyard or dispersed plan, with clear divisions between farm and farmhouse. Macdonell appears to have followed this pattern, creating a separation between farm functions – that is, between his home and his business interests.

Archaeological fragments

Artifacts allow archaeologists to reconstruct the past and to theorize about how the movement of these objects or fragments was affected by social, economic and technological change in a household over time.

At times, archaeology serves to document the past before its traces are completely lost or removed. Such was the case when half of the basement of the house was excavated prior to the installation of a new floor slab. General conclusions can be made regarding the nature of the deposition of the large quantity of artifacts discovered.

There were large amounts of animal bones as evidence of the problem of rodent infestation on the property over the years. The large quantity of nails that were discovered indicates the replacement of the wood floors, at least twice in the history of the house, and then the gradual disintegration of existing floorboards

due to rising damp. The presence of the original floor joist system was recorded through the east half of the basement. Original stone fireplace hearths in the northeast and southeast rooms were also recorded. One artifact of note that was discovered is a Copeland Garret/late Spode tea bowl (blue transfer print, c. 1833-47). Fragments of this bowl were recovered during the 1981 excavations and additional fragments were found during the 2009 field season that mend directly onto this vessel, allowing reconstruction of its original profile.

The architectural artifact by Romas Bubelis

Unearthed historical archaeological artifacts are static objects without current functional use as originally intended. But an architectural artifact like the Macdonell-Williamson House is an object that continues to be used and is therefore subject to continuing change.

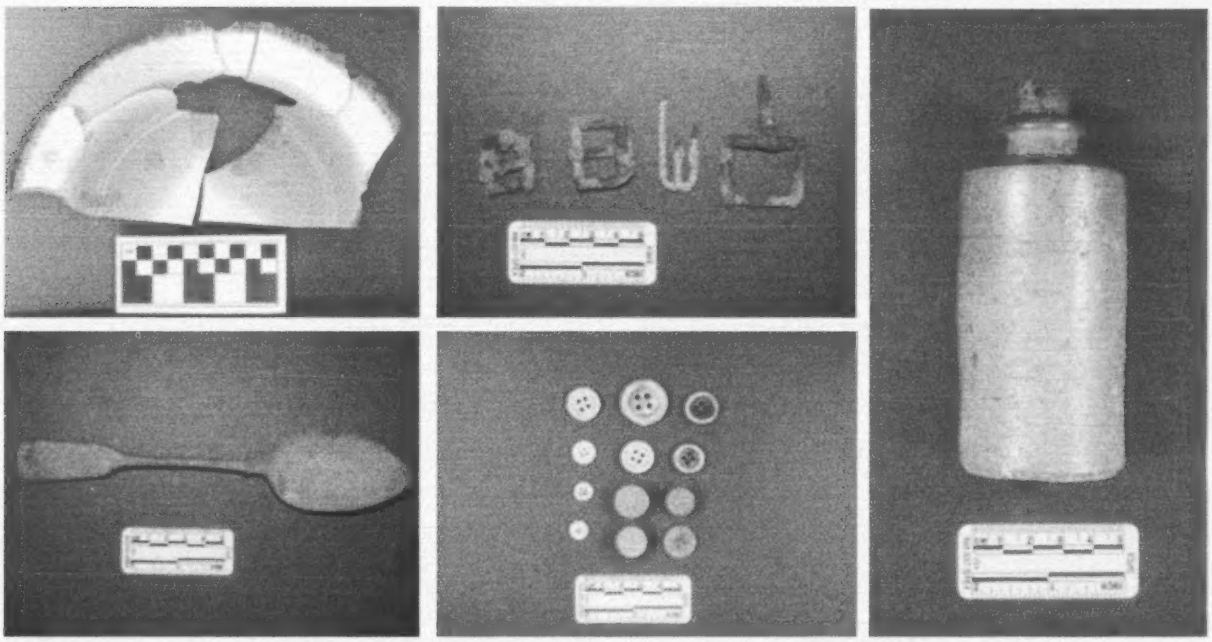
This change may be expressed as a desire to go back through restoration or even reconstruction or it may move forward through rehabilitation and re-use. But, if surviving, original, aged material and finishes are recognized as having a certain authority, then a preservation approach to fragments, patina and layers must also be embraced.

In 2014, a project to reinforce the timberframe structure of the Macdonell-Williamson House required that it be completely emptied of its contents. This clearing of movable objects brought the character of the house as artifact into sharp focus and raised issues around the value of emptiness, the power of ruin as an interpretive strategy and building archaeology as a method of understanding the layers of surviving building fabric.

Precedents

Nowhere is emptiness more agreeable than in the case of architectural ruins where the appreciation of the effects of the passage of time is accompanied by a certain sense of abandonment and melancholy where human activity is imagined in the past tense.

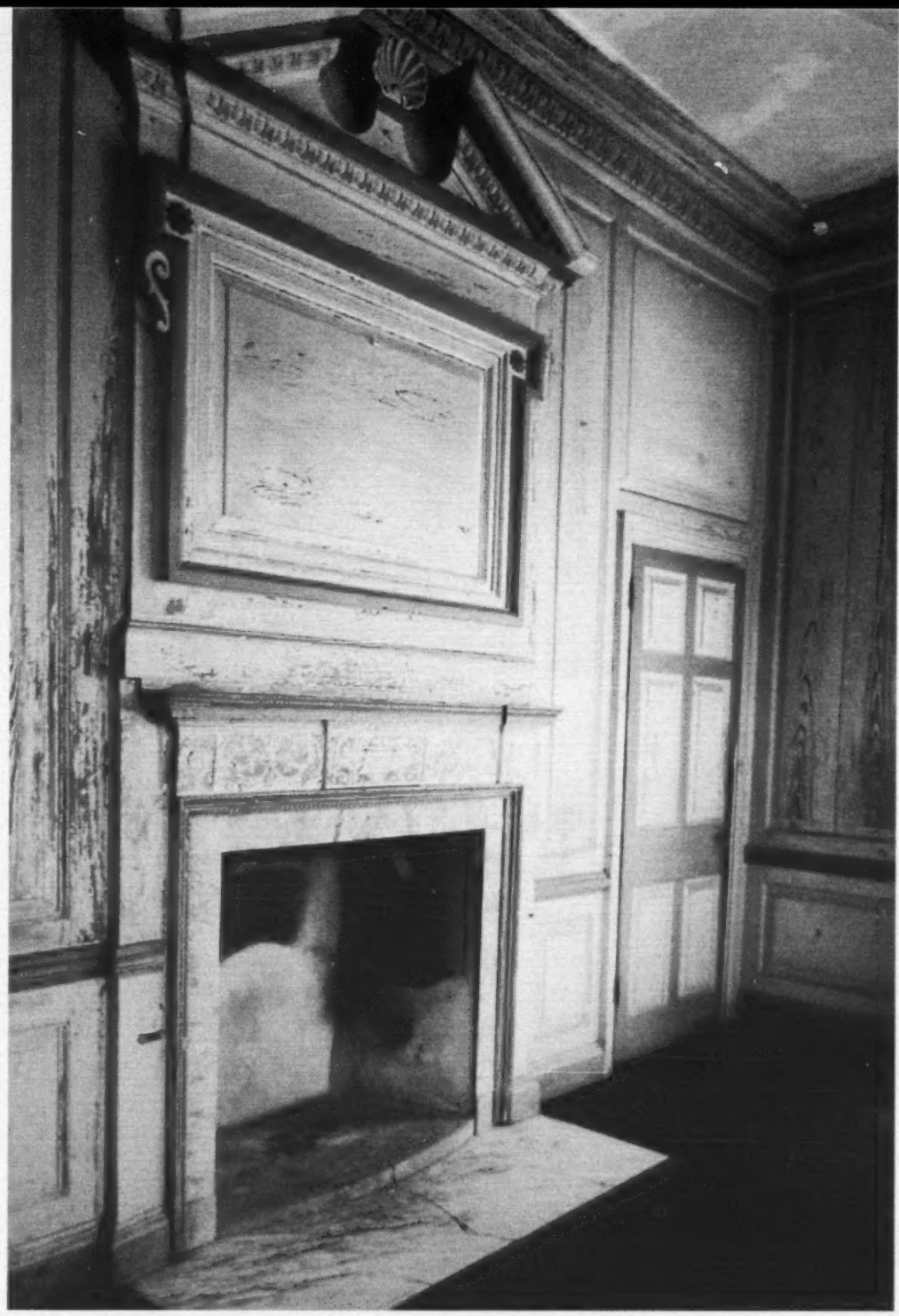
The appropriation of emptiness, partial ruin and building archaeology in heritage museums is not without precedent. Drayton Hall, located near Charleston, South



Over 135,000 artifacts were excavated during multiple field seasons at the MacDonell-Williamson site. Clockwise from top left: a blue edged platter, horse harness buckles, a stoneware bottle with cork intact, various buttons and a spoon.

Carolina, is one of the oldest preserved plantation houses in the United States. Built in 1738, it amazingly retains most of its interior plaster and fine Georgian woodwork and finishes. Following seven generations of family ownership, the Draytons donated the property to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1974. In an unusual move, the National Trust decided to preserve the house as it was received. It remains to this day without modern environmental controls and is treated as a laboratory to explore techniques for conservation of its 18th-century fabric. Although a heritage attraction, it was intentionally left empty of furnishings and cultural objects in order to focus on the building itself as an artifact worth studying. As a consequence, perhaps intended and perhaps not, the melancholy grandeur of the place is intensified by its emptiness.

A more recent precedent can be found in the Tenement Museum in New York City's Lower East Side. Founded in 1988, this museum seeks to interpret the 19th- and 20th-century immigrant experience as lived in a typical tenement apartment block. The subject block was built in 1863 and was home to hundreds of families, and received multiple alterations throughout its 72 years of operation. It was boarded up and abandoned in 1935, surviving as a virtual time capsule for the next 50 years.



Georgian-era mantelpiece at Drayton Hall.

Half of its apartments were restored, furnished and interpreted to represent the lives of previous tenants from specific periods, but the remaining apartments were left in as-found condition – unfurnished, with old fittings, peeling faded paint and chipped railings, worn stairs and door casings – bearing the traces of former inhabitants. The restored domain is entered through the as-found one. To stand in these stifling rooms and corridors is to reflect on tenement life and trigger an imagination of what it might have been like. In their preservation philosophy, architects Li-Saltzman wrote that the tenement project "is predicated on retaining the palpable sense of history contained

The basement bake-oven and open hearth, preserved as an architectural ruin.

within its walls, and on providing both the experience of the tenement as people lived there, and as it was found."

The Macdonell-Williamson House in Pointe Fortune falls somewhere between the exceptional grandeur of Drayton Hall and the humility of the New York Tenement Museum. When built in 1817, Macdonell-Williamson House was a notably grand undertaking in both size and craftsmanship, considering Pointe-Fortune's then-wilderness location on the Ottawa River some 60 miles (100 kilometres) upstream from Montreal. The principal rooms received decorative plaster cornices and panelled wood window surrounds of exceptional quality. A generously proportioned ballroom with elaborate ceiling medallion was included on the second floor. Clusters of bed-closets opening onto a common sitting room with a fireplace was an ingenious arrangement of sleeping quarters for Macdonell's large family of 12 children in what would have been a difficult house to heat. In its day, it would have been an exceptionally fine house.

The power of ruin

What we see today, of course, is different but no less intriguing – a visual character that has become complex and diffuse because it evolved as a result of historical circumstances. It comprises fragments from different eras that, taken together, are more evocative of the building's life than a restoration or reconstruction approximating the original could be. An archaeological sensibility that includes research, observation and analysis is needed to look beyond the deterioration and to appreciate the building fabric.

The strained finances of John Macdonell – and then of his son – meant that the interiors, although grand, where not redecorated with the customary frequency. The Williamsons, however, inadvertently protected many early finishes by covering them with wallpaper. For most of the 80 years following the Macdonell era, the house was used only seasonally. It was never wired for electricity and had no plumbing or heating system other than the original fireplaces. The absence of such modernizations in no small measure accounts for its current feeling of antiquity. Lastly, the house was vacant from its expropriation in 1961 until about 1995. During this lengthy period, much detail was lost to vandalism and theft, or through accelerated deterioration from water damage.

Much of the site's remaining national heritage

significance resides in the quality and quantity of the building's surviving early-19th-century decorative plasterwork and painted finishes, particularly those on the second floor remaining in aged and unrestored condition. The ballroom's beaded concave plaster cornice adorned with grape leaves and a row of projecting acanthus leaves is missing in sections, but there is more than enough left to evoke a sense of its former splendour.

The breaks reveal it in cross-section. The surviving plaster is in frail condition – the lime in its core having leeched out, leaving only sand with a thin gypsum outer crust. Much of this decorative plaster is painted over with calcimine. The staircase has a curved ceiling with deep blue calcimine paint of an intense hue and flat finish characteristic of the building's earliest period.

Calcimine is a water-soluble paint that was favoured for plaster mouldings because it could be easily washed off prior to recoating in order to avoid loss of sharpness due to paint build-up. Its survival into the 21st century is unexpected and rare. Elsewhere, walls have been over-coated with successive colours, now faded or partially chipped away, creating a rich colour matrix of depth and texture. In the basement, only remnants of the original lath and plaster ceiling remain, tucked between hewn timber beams accentuated with decorative beaded edges. In contrast, the plaster cornice of the ground-floor dining room is completely intact, requiring only minor repair to maintain its original integrity.

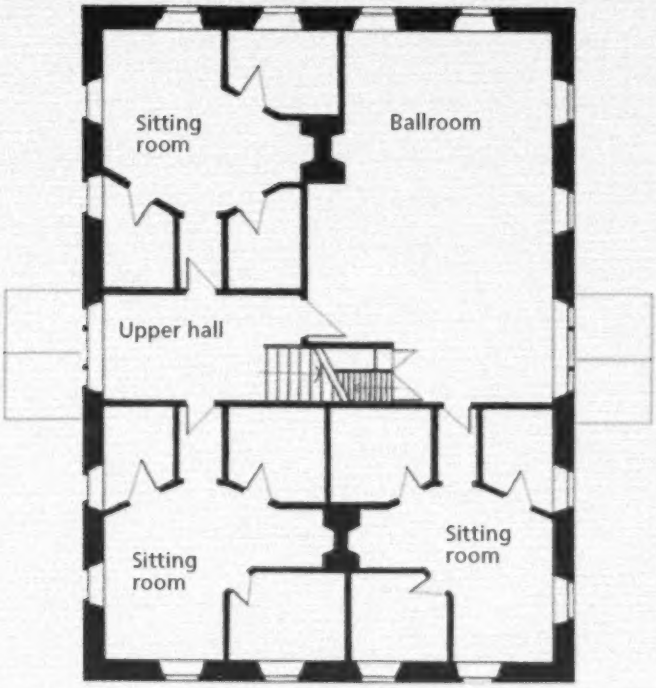
Interpretation

The house today is an amalgam of recent preservation efforts that include part rehabilitation, part restoration and those elements preserved in partial ruin. The latter are treasured – unlike the former, they cannot be re-created. Like fragmented archaeological artifacts, these architectural artifacts speak loudest when left unaltered and in isolation.

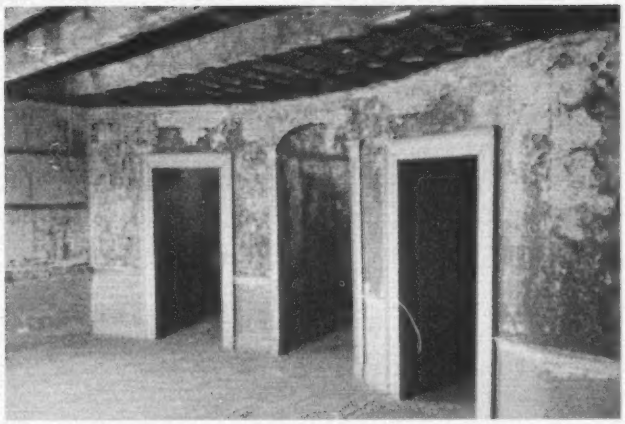
Perhaps restoration architect Peter John Stokes got it right in a report to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1969. He wrote: "Perhaps museum use on a limited basis suggested, of work in progress, of the isolated piece of fine furniture in what is basically an excellent architectural exhibit *per se*, and the graphic illustration techniques used as an interpretive supplement are all that this scheme should include."

Dena Doroszenko is the Archaeologist with the Ontario Heritage Trust. Romas Bubelis is the Trust's Architect.

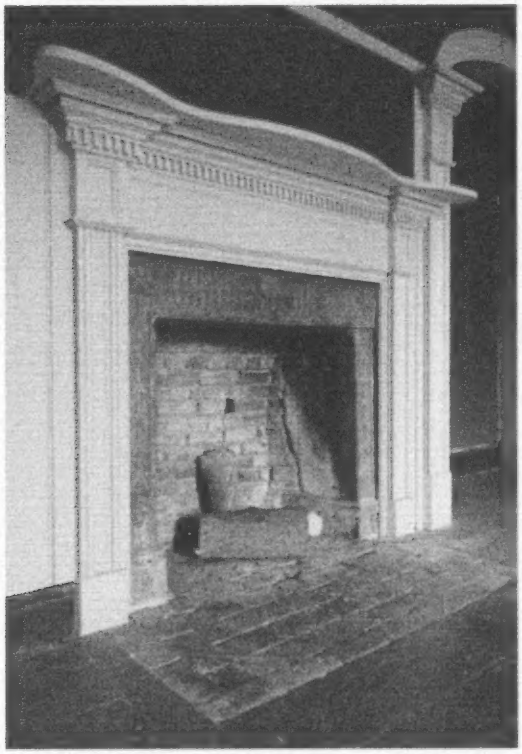
The 1817 plaster cornice moulding from the second-floor ballroom, with its calcimine paint, survives in partially ruined state.



Second-floor plan, c. 1817, showing original layout of three sitting rooms, each surrounded by three bed closets.



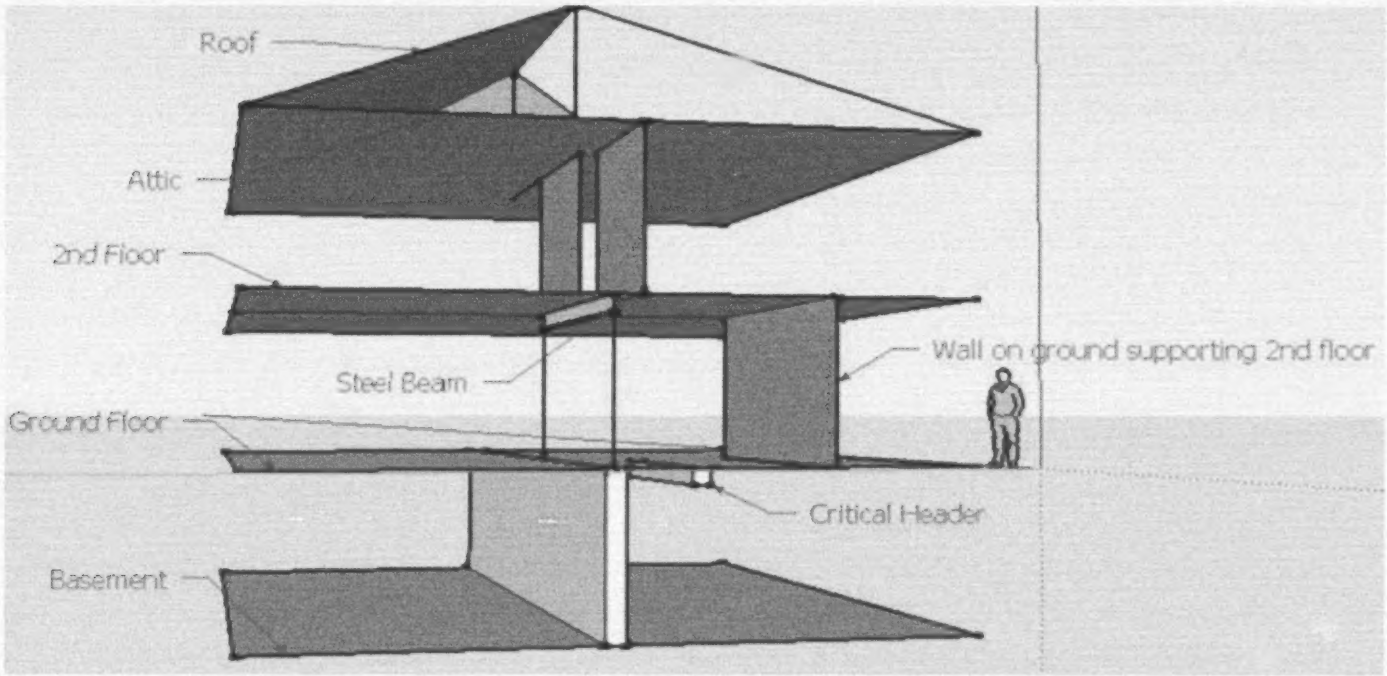
Unique second-floor sitting room with bed closets, with original calcimine paint finishes preserved intact.



The restored drawing room fireplace has an 1817-era brick hearth and carved stone surround with reproduction painted wood mantel.

Engineering a solution: A structural perspective of Macdonell-Williamson House

By Michael Csiki, Majula Koita and Chantel Godin



Section through Macdonell-Williamson House: This image allows you to visualize the loads travelling through the walls and floors

The structural rehabilitation of Macdonell-Williamson House has provided a great opportunity for the engineers at Quinn Dressel Associates to contribute to the preservation of a piece of Canadian history.

Over the years, the house was altered by its various owners who added certain features and demolished others. For a period of time, the house also stood vacant, exposed to the elements. As a result of both change and neglect, the original structural load path changed from the time it was first constructed. (The load path is the natural path in which the weight of the floors, snow, roof, walls and occupants travels through the joists, beams, columns and walls and eventually makes its way down into the foundation and diffuses into the earth.)

The two-storey house consists of solid, stone exterior walls and foundations, stone and brick chimneys and large timber beams spanning up to 13 meters (43 feet) in length. When the Williamsons owned the house, the west fireplace – which supported the second floor and a section of the roof – was removed. Over time, this caused the second floor to sag, resulting in diagonal shear cracks in the plaster wall that remain visible today.

With the removal of the fireplace, the loads changed paths and travelled an alternate route down a partition wall and onto the ground floor joists, which are framed into a header beam supported by the foundation wall. This header beam, which was not intended to carry the loads from the second floor or roof, was under such stress that the deflection and rotation of the timber became clearly noticeable.

In 1994, Restoration Engineering of Brockville advised that new steel beams and columns be installed to support the sagging second floor, but the damage to the critical header beam below had already been done. In 2012, temporary walls recommended by James Knight & Associates Professional Engineers were installed to compensate for deficient support

of certain sections of the ground floor due to the overloaded header beam.

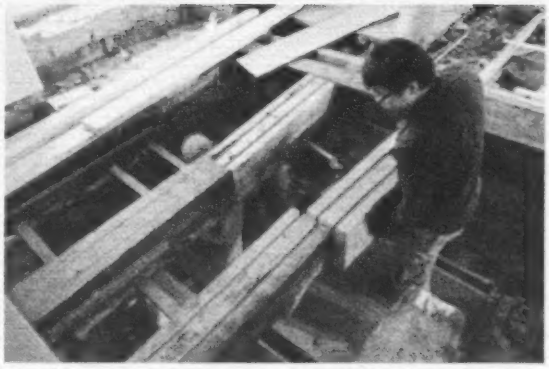
A number of solutions were considered to address additional loadings imposed on the first-floor timber beams. Ideally, replacing the original deteriorated timber beams with new timber of appropriate size and section would have been the simplest solution for restoring the building to its full structural capacity. But the desire to preserve original building fabric precluded this type of intervention. Another common rehabilitation strategy involves bolting steel plates on the sides of the timber beams. Macdonell-Williamson House, however, has a unique feature on the underside of its first-floor timbers, which are exposed in the basement: they have a hand-carved beaded edge. In order to preserve this unique heritage feature, an alternate method was selected – the Wood Epoxy Reinforcement (WER) system.

The WER system allows us to conceal reinforcement material into the body of the existing wood to create a composite structural member of sufficient strength. Different reinforcement materials can be used – including carbon-fibre, fibreglass or, in this case, steel. In order to install the concealed steel, the top surface of the old beam was exposed by removing the floor boards above. While the old beam was being reinforced, it was temporarily supported from below. A precise, narrow slot was cut into the top of the old beam using an electric chain router. Then, a custom-made steel reinforcing plate was inserted into that slot, accompanied by a liquid epoxy.

The WER system can also be used to extend the length of an existing timber by using the reinforcement to join two separate lengths of beam. An added benefit of this system is that it will, in most cases, prevent any further deterioration of the wood caused by fungi, insects or other agents.

Liquid epoxy injected into the wood also has the capability of easily filling voids and irregular cavities. Epoxy resin binds the steel plate to the wood, as well as serving as a filler to replace decayed or missing parts of the wood. Ultimately, the process adds to the strength of the new assembly.

Macdonell-Williamson House has seen some truly state-of-the-art restoration work over the years. Steel-framing support now compensates for a missing chimney and the concealed WER reinforcement re-channels the load path and increases load capacity, while retaining as much of the original timbers as possible. This work will extend the lifespan of the house, and will preserve the heritage building for generations to come.



New and old timber sections prepared for insertion of reinforcing steel plates.

Routing out slots in old timbers using a precision guided electric chain router.

Michael Csiki is a Structural Designer at Quinn Dressel Associates. Majula Koita is an engineering student at the University of Waterloo. Chantel Godin is a freelance technical writer.

Understanding Macdonell-Williamson House through four artifacts

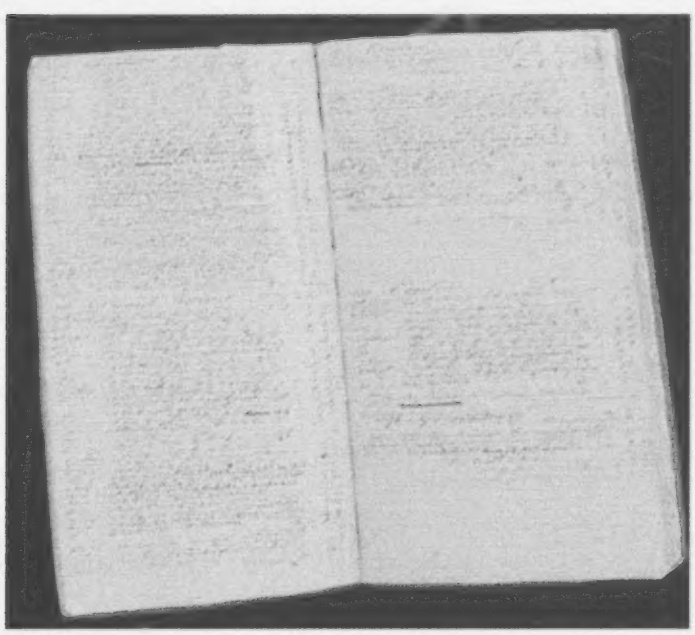
By Sam Wesley

It is tempting, while admiring Macdonell-Williamson House's centuries-old stone walls, Palladian grandeur and picturesque setting, to conjure up an era defined by continuity – when long-standing traditions were strong, when travel and communications were slow, and when people's lives and livelihoods were firmly anchored to the land on which they lived. Pastoral, quaint, cyclical and fundamentally local. In other words, an era very unlike our own. But a closer look at four objects from the site tells a different story.

The house (then called Poplar Villa) was constructed in 1817 in the wake of a devastating war. Its owner, John Macdonell, was a retired fur trader and soldier who had experienced his share of travel, upheaval and adventure. Although his Highland Scots Catholic roots ran strong, Macdonell spent much of his youth in the Mohawk Valley, New York, before his Loyalist family (they had been Jacobites in Scotland) fled to the Canadas after the American Revolution. Macdonell's wife, Magdeleine Poitras, who he met while living in the Qu'Appelle valley (in present-day Saskatchewan), was Métis and their grand new house on the banks of the Ottawa River was located in a predominantly French-speaking community that straddled the border with Lower Canada. The general store and freight forwarding business that Macdonell operated on his property attracted visitors and customers from distant regions, making the site more public in nature and contributing to a rich confluence of cultural influences.

Despite its proximity to the Ottawa River – the super transportation route of its day – this was a frontier household in a frontier community. Traditional social structures, relationships and practices were often undermined, or at least complicated, by the pressures of frontier life. Attempts by the Macdonell family to establish order, traditions and decorum were sometimes remarkably successful, given the context. Other times, they proved idealistic and ineffective.

An examination of several representative artifacts from the household and property provide insight into the Macdonells' efforts to establish order in an environment characterized by movement, flux and fluidity.



General store ledger.

Excerpts

Brown, James	Irish worker for Wells
Campbell, Orsinone	This fellow wrought at mill with old Whitcomb & ran away to the U. States. A dead loss jMcD
Clarke, Ebanezer	Deceased. Balance owing waived
Clarke, William	Son of Ebenezer. Balance too small to be asked for
Clough, James	He paid his Acct. In old arnesses (sic) & is quits to 7 years interest on 40 £
Harrington, Mary	Servant girl
McLaren, John	Boatman
McLaren, Thomas	Teacher
Ross, Robert	Pays by barter, cradle, gelding

Isaac Brock half-penny token 1816.

In addition to his freight forwarding business, Macdonell operated a general store at Poplar Villa that offered a variety of goods to the local community and to those travelling along the Ottawa River. More than 100 years later, in the mid-20th century, the house's occupants opened a drawer and found an original ledger documenting hundreds of transactions at the store during the 1820s and 1830s.

This 275-page ledger offers fascinating insights into Macdonell's business and clientele. Information recorded about account holders often includes their occupations (e.g., boatmen, hatters, voyageurs and vinters), as well as anecdotal information about their health (for instance, Bernard Courville died of cholera), their whereabouts (Darby Byrne married Jock Judah's daughter and ran away) and physical characteristics (Isaac Thompson, "Big nose"). It also indicates that barter was common, as accounts were often paid in goods and services instead of cash. Many accounts appear not to have been paid at all, which could help explain Macdonell's own financial difficulties in the later part of his life. Willingness to extend credit would have been a sign of wealth – but the practice may, ironically, have helped drive status-conscious Macdonell into financial distress.

This half-penny token, unearthed at Macdonell-Willliamson House, reminds us that the impact of the War of 1812 was still being felt across Upper Canada as

Sacred heart pendant

Macdonell was establishing his home and business at Poplar Villa. The copper coin was issued in 1816 to commemorate the death of General Isaac Brock, who was killed leading the defence of Upper Canada in 1812. The inscription, "SR ISAAC BROCK THE HERO OF UPR CANADA" encircles an image of two cherubs crowning an urn with laurel wreaths. The reverse reads "1816: SUCCESS TO COMMERCE & PEACE TO THE WORLD." Commercial success and peace were exactly what Macdonell sought as he retired to his Ottawa River estate.

War and conflict had plagued the Macdonell family for generations, driving them from their homes and disrupting their livelihoods. John Macdonell had himself participated in the War of 1812 as a commissioned captain in the Corps of Canadian Voyageurs, and was likely taken prisoner at the Battle of St. Regis. His efforts to obtain compensation for losses suffered during the war dragged on into the 1840s and were ultimately unsuccessful.

This sacred heart pendant, uncovered during archaeological excavations at Macdonell-Williamson House, most likely dates from the time of John Beverly Polifax. The sacred heart is a predominantly Roman Catholic devotion in which the physical heart of Jesus Christ is venerated as a symbol of Christ's love for humanity. Visual representations of the sacred heart are central to the devotion and often appear on badges and pendants. The sacred heart symbolism on this pendant, as in most representations, includes a heart in flames encircled with thorns and topped with a cross (signifying Christ's burning love and His sufffering). On the reverse is a crucifix.

The devotion is closely linked to the notion of family and family love. The Macdonell family was renowned for their devotion to Roman Catholicism. Although Upper Canada was dominated culturally and politically by Protestants, the Macdonells were able to achieve status and influence in a region populated mostly by French-Canadian Catholics. While employed by the North West Company, Macdonell was known for his piety and his insistence that employees in his charge observe the feasts of the Catholic church. This earned him the nickname of "le prêtre" or "the priest."

In the early 1820s, David Thompson, one of the most prolific surveyors and map-makers ever to work in North America, was hired to survey the border between Upper and Lower Canada, which ran south from Pointe Fortune on the Ottawa River to the St. Lawrence River, east of Cornwall.

Thompson, like Macdonell, had worked for the North West Company and had retired to Upper Canada following the War of 1812. The two men, who certainly would have known one another, both suffered severe financial losses when the remains of the North West Company declared bankruptcy in 1825, following amalgamation with the Hudson's Bay Company. Stone markers, such as this one found near the Macdonell-Williamson property, were laid along the border in 1860. Upper Canada is inscribed on one side and Lower Canada on the other. It is a reminder of the proximity of Macdonell-Williamson House not only to the Quebec border, but also to French-Canadian cultural influences. Thompson's meticulous survey and the presence of these stone markers contain a certain irony, given the site's social and cultural ambiguities.

Sam Wesley is the Trust's Site Coordinator for the Parliament interpretive centre in Toronto.

WER CANADA

A story of two families

By Valerie Verity

A family reunion in 1994. On the left, Macdonell descendants. On the right, Williamson descendants.

"We wanted the house to become a living space where visitors would be encouraged to participate in whatever was being planned during the summer – workshops, tours, quilting, music, the tea room and general store, plus so much more. We also initiated our archival collection and our photograph collection, which are invaluable today, plus a library relating to the two families, the property itself, the Ottawa River and surroundings as they all relate to Canadian history.

Early on, we conducted the all-important search for descendants of the two families who had owned and lived in Macdonell-Williamson House ... We found them scattered across Canada – from British Columbia to Halifax, the Prairies, Ontario, Quebec, even some in the United States. These descendants became longtime members of the Friends, sometimes life members, and contributed to the site's preservation.

John D. Redfern (Quebec). Acting Co-President of the Friends of the Macdonell-Williamson House and direct descendant of William Williamson and Mary Ellen Everett.

What a story the Macdonell-Williamson House and property can tell! Its location – with a commanding view overlooking the Ottawa River (where goods and people have travelled for centuries) as well as its strategic site between Montreal and Ottawa – has ensured that Macdonell-Williamson House has contributed for generations to the fascinating story of Canada.

But what prompted Macdonell to build it in the first place? And what enticed Williamson later to purchase the house?

Both John Macdonell and William Williamson were self-made men and entrepreneurs. Macdonell, as a partner in the North West Company, travelled by canoe up the Ottawa River to the western territories. He married a Métis woman (Magdeleine Poitras) and, in later years, helped fund the development of Manitoba's Red River Settlement. As a successful partner in the North West Company, he was able to finance the construction of a house (in 1817) and establish his business enterprises.

Macdonell's endeavours were varied – store owner, militia officer, justice of the peace, lock operator, potash supplier, judge, farmer, road commissioner, financier and member of the Upper Canada House of Assembly. He died at Pointe Fortune in 1850.

Williamson's story was similar. In 1882, he bought the house, which remained in the family until the early 1960s. Williamson was a farmer's son who left the farm to pursue business activities. He chose the lucrative lumber industry to make his mark. Operating from his Pointe Fortune base and the Laurentian Lumber Company's St. James Street office in Montreal, he was active domestically and internationally in the lumber trade.

Williamson's business efforts, too, quickly became an integral part of the local infrastructure. By 1902, with abundant water power and wood products, he was able to assist in the acquisition, construction and operation of waterworks, electric works,

Four generations of the Williamson family.

In their book, Friends of the Macdonell-Williamson House Inc., A Developmental History (1991-2011), authors Elizabeth Muir and Valerie Verity have documented the 20-year history of the Friends' involvement with the revitalization of this unique site. The 178-page volume acknowledges the effort that has gone into rehabilitating the house and keeping its stories alive.

The authors wish to thank the Ontario Heritage Trust, as well as the members, volunteers, staff and family descendants who have devoted countless hours to stewarding the house and ensuring that visitors can experience its grandeur.

Price: $25 plus postage. For information, call 613-399-3570 or email: valerie.verity@yahoo.ca or esmuir22@yahoo.ca.

tramways and steamboats; to manufacture and sell pulp and paper; and to build and operate telephone and telegraph lines.

As with Macdonell, Williamson was also involved in regional agencies and services as a captain in the Argenteuil Militia and as justice of the peace. He was also politically active at the local and federal levels.

The house played a unique role in both men's marriages. Macdonell built the house for his wife and their 12 children at a time when North West Company partners seldom brought their country wives back east. Williamson, too, made his wife – Mary Ellen Everett, a descendant of Cotton Mather, one of the founders of Harvard College – part owner of the house and its contents. This status was achieved in the year that Britain passed the Married Woman's Property Act, which finally allowed women to buy or own property.

The stories this house could tell? Come visit to learn all the details, view the exhibits and maybe talk to a descendant or two.

Valerie Verity is a founding Board member and founder of the Friends of the Macdonell-Williamson House/Les Amis de la maison Macdonell-Williamson.

Along the Ottawa River

By Erin Semande

The original Trans-Canada Highway

The Ottawa River is one of Canada's most important transportation routes, playing an integral role in many of the key stories that comprise Canada's history. From the area's first inhabitants to the explorers, guides, traders, loggers, settlers and entrepreneurs that followed, the Ottawa River was truly the original Trans-Canada Highway.

In the Algonquin language, the Ottawa River is known as Kitchissippi – meaning Big River. The name "Ottawa" is derived from the Algonquin term *adawe* ("to trade"). The river's source is at Lake Capimitchigama in Quebec, 250 km (156 miles) north of Ottawa. It flows approximately 1,300 km (807 miles) to the St. Lawrence, forming the border between Ontario and Quebec for most of its length.

The canoe was the primary method of transportation for First Nations living in the Ottawa Valley for thousands of years. Evidence from as early as 6,000 years ago suggests that a wide trade and communication network was enabled by the Ottawa River and its tributaries.

Originally built and used by aboriginal traders, the canoe later became pivotal in the exploration and development of the Canadian wilderness by European explorers, settlers and industrialists. In the 18th and 19th centuries, France's North American colonial economy depended on the fur trade, which relied on the famous waterway routes that began and ended with the Ottawa River. This era saw the expansion of the country through the courageous coureurs de bois and voyageurs, travelling in bark canoes, as well as the beginnings of the Hudson's Bay Company. Voyageur life remains fixed in Canadian imagery by artists such as Frances Anne Hopkins who captured the lifestyle in her first-hand account paintings. Hopkins painted in the 1870s, an era when use of the canoe for trade and transportation had already begun to wane, and the Hudson's Bay Company was replacing the canoe with steamboat and rail transport.

Bypassing the rapids of the Ottawa River has been a challenge since early trade routes were established by Canada's aboriginal people. Portage routes were used to get around the rapids, followed by basic canal systems. Entrepreneur John Macdonell took advantage of this high-traffic trade route by building his house on a strategic bluff on the Ontario shore of Ottawa River in 1817 and constructing a simple canal to avoid the raging rapids. By the 1830s, Macdonell's canal was insufficient to serve the growing importance of the Ottawa River as a trade route and a strategic bypass to the other Great Lakes in the event of a war with the United States. In the 1830s, a more sophisticated canal system was built by the British army. It consisted of the Grenville Canal, the Chute-à-Blondeau Canal and the Carillon Canal.

Although the early canals built on the Ottawa River were intended primarily for military purposes, the area's natural resources became an economic force that would alter the Ottawa River and its shores. Large sawmills were established close to falls and rapids for the production of hydraulic energy (and later hydroelectric energy) required to operate local mills. Mills attracted settlers, and communities such as Bytown (present-day Ottawa) grew around them.

One of the most dramatic changes to the Ottawa River occurred from 1959 to 1962 when Hydro Quebec constructed a dam at Carillon, across from Macdonell-Williamson House, to supply power to Montreal. The dam raised water levels, flooding the former Carillon and Grenville canals and silencing the rapids. Its official opening in 1963 marked the end of commercial navigation on the Ottawa River system.

> "The Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee looks forward to the day that this important Canadian River, arguably its greatest, will fully join the Canadian Heritage Rivers System. Designation will provide the opportunity for communities both large and small, from Hawkesbury to Haileybury, to join together in celebration of the Ottawa's rich cultural heritage and its world-class recreational activities.
>
> *Larry Graham, lifelong resident of the Ottawa River, avid paddler and Chair of the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee.*

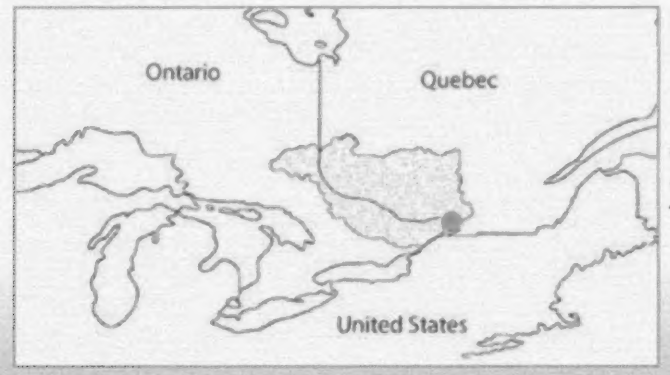
While no longer used for trade and shipping of goods, the Ottawa River is now explored in power boats, rafts, kayaks, sail boats and canoes. Canoes are still treasured by those looking for a relaxing way to explore the natural beauty and cultural sites of the Ottawa River.

Sources: This article only scratches the surface and readers are encouraged to visit the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee's website at www.ottawariver.org. The Trust gratefully acknowledges the Designation Committee for use of A Background Study for Nomination of the Ottawa River Under the Canadian Heritage Rivers System (2005), which forms the basis of this article. A special thank you to Larry Graham, Chairman of the Ottawa River Heritage Designation Committee and Chief Kirby Whiteduck for speaking with Trust staff and for sharing their understanding and experiences of the Ottawa River.

Erin Semande is a Researcher with the Ontario Heritage Trust.

The Canadian Heritage Rivers System

While designation to the Canadian Heritage Rivers System offers no legal protection for the river, it is nonetheless a proven and effective community-based stewardship program that engages citizens in conserving and celebrating their rivers. Designation is an incredible honour that is reserved for rivers that the provincial and federal governments have recognized as having exceptional natural and/or cultural heritage.



Ottawa watershed showing the location of Macdonell-Williamson House.

The river through history

15,000 years ago	Laurentide ice sheet (glacier) begins to melt away. As the glaciers retreat, saltwater from the Atlantic Ocean floods the valley to form the Champlain Sea.
13,000 years ago	Ottawa Valley is covered by the Champlain Sea.
10,000 years ago	Champlain Sea recedes.
8,500 years ago	Earliest evidence of human presence along the Ottawa River.
8,000 years ago	Present drainage system of the Ottawa River Valley established.
6,000 years ago	Ottawa River gradually drops to its traditional level, and forests of white pine become mixed forests of hemlock, pine and hardwoods.
3,000 years ago	Pictographs representing traditional understanding of the spiritual and physical landscape to the Algonquin peoples are marked along the river's banks.

"The first recorded European contact in Algonquin Territory was with Samuel de Champlain in 1613 on the Kitchissippi (the Ottawa River). On this journey, he meets with members of at least three different bands of the Algonquin Nation along the Kitchissippi.

The last band he meets with is the Kichesipirini, the Big River people, at present-day Morrison's Island near Pembroke, Ontario. Champlain went to proceed farther upriver, but while he is treated very well and cordially by the Kichesipirini, Chief Tessouat does not allow him to pass. The Kichesipirini and their Chief Tessouat decided which non-Algonquins could pass up and down the Kitchissippi and levied tolls on those who were allowed to pass, including explorers and missionaries. Along the river and its many tributaries, there are many Algonquin archaeological, sacred and burial sites that attest to long occupation and use.

Chief Kirby Whiteduck, Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation

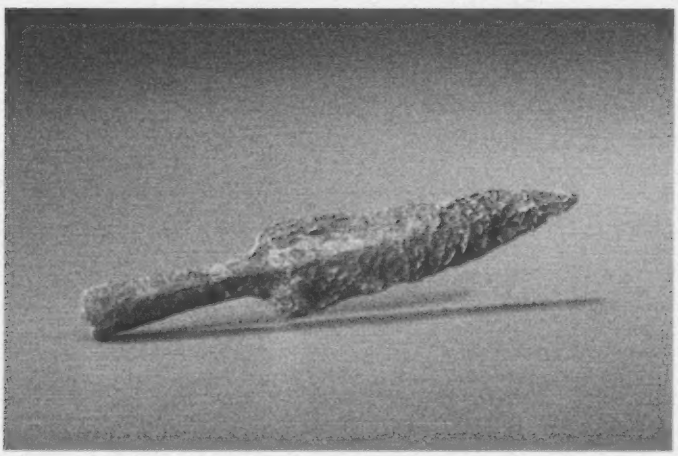
1608	Étienne Brûlé is the first European to explore the Ottawa River.
1613	Samuel de Champlain travels up-river to the vicinity of present-day Pembroke. He is cordially greeted, but is refused passage by the Kichesipirini.
1817	John Macdonell builds his large Georgian house on a strategic bluff on the Ontario shore of the Ottawa River.
1857	Queen Victoria selects Ottawa, located on the shores of the river that bears the same name, as the capital of Canada.
1862	Pembroke industrialist McAllister uses water wheels in his mills to generate electricity for commercial purposes.
1885	Hydroelectric power generation begins on the Ontario side of the river.
1945	First self-contained nuclear reaction in Canada initiated at Chalk River Laboratories on the banks of the Ottawa River.

Ottawa River by the numbers

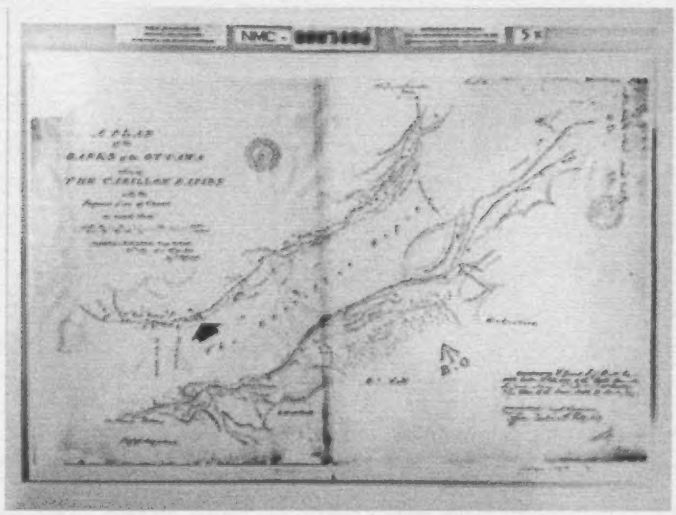
4	The number of major geological subdivisions crossed by the Ottawa River – Superior Province, Cobalt Plate, Grenville Province and St. Lawrence Lowlands.
33	Species of amphibian and reptiles, including the mudpuppy and common map turtle (at risk).
43	Dams in the Ottawa River watershed, making it one of the most highly regulated rivers in Canada.
45	Percentage of the watershed in Ontario (the rest is in Quebec).
80	Number of tributaries (two of which – the Mattawa and the Rideau – are designated Canadian Heritage Rivers).
80	Species at risk, including the loggerhead shrike, eastern cougar, bald eagle and American ginseng.
85	Species of fish observed in the river.
90	Deepest point (in metres) at the Carillon Reservoir.
150	Height (in metres) of the sacred Oiseau Rock that rises out of the Ottawa River in Pontiac County, Quebec.
300	Number of species of birds for which the Ottawa River watershed provides habitat.
1,271	Approximate length (in kilometres) of the Ottawa River.
14,000	Number of pleasure craft that have been noted annually in the Ottawa-Gatineau region.
146,300	The area of the watershed (in square kilometres) – twice the size of New Brunswick.
1,670,000	Number of people living in the watershed (2001 census data).
341,000,000	Litres of water taken from the river each day at the Britannia and Lemieux Islands water purification plants.

Paddlers with the Ottawa River Canoe Brigade. The brigade inspires participants to connect with the river's heritage and share in its safe keeping. Photo courtesy of Larry Graham.

Oiseau Rock, a sacred site for aboriginal peoples who have left behind a remarkable legacy of ancient pictographs drawn using red ochre. Photo courtesy of Larry Graham.



Native copper knife or spear point of Lake Superior copper, produced during the Middle Archaic times, approximately 6,100 years ago. Found by Clyde Kennedy during his 1963 excavations at the Allumettes Island-1 site (AL-1). Canadian Museum of History, BkGg-11:1049, IMG2008-0583-0005-Dm.



"A Plan of the Banks of the Ottawa shewing the Carillon Rapids with the proposed line of Canal to avoid them. Copyed from a sketch made by Major Dy Vernet. 1829." Courtesy of the Library and Archives Canada/Maps, Plans and Charts of Canada/ NMC 7406

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Photo: Fulford Place, Brockville

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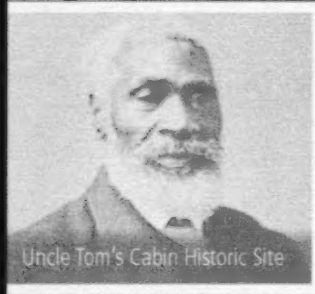
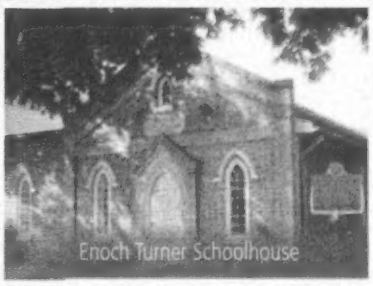
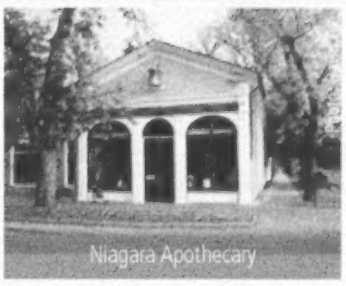
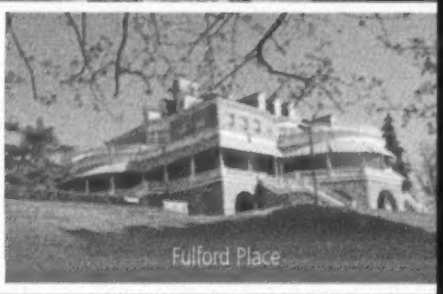

Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site


Enoch Turner Schoolhouse


Niagara Apothecary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